

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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SHE LOOKED AND MET NICK'S GAZE. "I WILL MARRY YOU ON TWO CONDITIONS."

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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A Swindler in Petticoats;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S PRETTY PRISONER.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

L. Z. TO C. K.

Nick Carter's daily habit is to glance over the "personal" advertisements in the *Herald*, every morning, as he eats his breakfast.

That column has, on more than one occasion, furnished him with clues which led up to important information. Many of the messages therein found have peculiar interest to the great detective.

On the morning to which I particularly refer, Nick's eyes suddenly became fixed upon this particular personal:

"If C. K. is in the city, why does he not communicate at once with L. Z?"

Ordinarily, the advertisement would have had no significance for him. But another circumstance, fresh in his mind at the time, caused him to read it over the second time.

At that moment the door of the dining-room opened, and Chick came in. The assistant took his place at the table, with the remark that his early walk had sharpened his appetite.

"Well, who lives at No. — West Fifty-seventh street?" was Nick's inquiry, when Chick got fairly started at his breakfast.

"Wilbur Luddington."

"Luddington? The lawyer?"

"That's his profession, but I reckon he doesn't have to follow it for a living," smiled Chick.

"No, I believe he is very rich. But he retains his offices on Broadway, if I am not mistaken."

"Now, Nick, maybe you'll tell me why I was requested to go up there and find out who lived at that number."

"Certainly. I found that little slip of paper in a suspicious place last evening,

and I am curious to discover what it means."

Nick laid a small slip of rather dirty paper on the table, on which was written "No. — West Fifty-seventh street."

"Where did you get it?"

"From beneath the lining of the hat of a man who now lies on a slab in the dead house at Bellevue Hospital."

Chick went on with his breakfast, but gave his chief a look as much as to say: "Tell me all about it." And Nick complied.

"I received a telephone message last evening from young Dr. G——, of the house staff, to come over, and I went.

"I want you to take a look at a dead man, Mr. Carter, about whom there is some mystery, I am sure.

"He was brought in here several hours ago, dying from heart trouble, and lived only about forty minutes. The fellow never spoke a word after he was lifted into the ambulance.

"There isn't even so much as a scrap of paper on him, to tell who or what he was. Still, I believe he belongs to the better grade of the criminal class, and if he does, I thought you might recognize him."

"The doctor did not make a mistake. The body was that of a notorious criminal, and I recognized him almost as soon as I looked at the face, though I last saw him alive many years ago."

"Any one I knew, Nick?"

"You ought to remember him. Do you recollect the robbery of the jewelry store on Grand street in 1884?"

"Stop! One moment. You don't mean Casimer Kane?"

"Nobody but Casimer Kane, who, with

his pals, got away so successfully with that rich haul, and has never been seen by the police to this day."

"Where has he been all these years, Nick?"

"Not in this city, you may be sure, unless for a very few days."

"Had he changed so little, Nick?"

"Not enough to conceal his identity even in death; and he took no chances, either, in whatever brought him back."

"Disguised?"

"Yes; false beard and wig. That was what made Dr. G—— conclude he was a criminal."

"Where did they get him?"

"In a saloon on Third Avenue. He went into the saloon about four o'clock, took a seat at a table, and ordered a drink.

"The drink was served, but when the waiter tried to collect for it the customer was insensible. They summoned an ambulance and sent him to Bellevue."

"Did you trace him previous to his going into that saloon?"

"No; Patsy is on that tack. I set him at it last evening, and he has not yet reported."

"Nick, you always believed Kane and the whole kit left America after that Grand street job."

"I am sure of it."

"Then may it not be that Kane had but lately returned?"

"That is what I feel sure of."

"And that address of Lawyer Wilbur Luddington was all that you could find in his clothes?"

"There wasn't a mark of any kind, except the slip of paper, about his person."

"Why was he carrying that memorandum, Nick? A man like him usually has a memory which would make such a thing unnecessary."

"The memorandum was not for himself, my boy."

"Eh?"

"As you say, Casimer Kane wouldn't need such a guard to his memory. It was put into his hat lining for just such an emergency as it served."

"I don't catch on."

"Well, for once you're dead slow, Chick. The man was troubled with heart disease, and feared a sudden death."

"Great Scott! You don't mean the slip of paper was carried so as to notify Wilbur Luddington in case of his sudden death?"

"What other use could it serve?"

"You must be right. But what was there in common between Kane and Luddington?"

"How much of a family has Lawyer Luddington? I presume you made some inquiry on that point?"

"Oh, yes. The officer on the beat, I think, has a friend below stairs in the Luddington household, for he seems pretty well posted."

"Luddington is a widower, with no child living. His only son died, or was killed abroad a year or so ago. The widow of this son is now living with her father-in-law."

"And here comes Patsy," said Nick, as the latter, in his usual tempestuous way, came bursting into the room. "Did you run down your man, Patsy?"

"Didn't I, though. He landed two days ago from the French steamer *La*

Gascogne. Came ashore under the weather, and has been keeping close to his room at the Brevoort House ever since."

"What name did he use?"

"Giles Barremore."

"Humph! Well, had he lived till this morning, he might have been interested in reading this."

Nick pointed to the *Herald* personal signed L. Z. Patsy and Chick both read it.

"Wonder who 'L. Z.' is, Nick?" said Chick.

"Don't know, but I'm dead anxious to find out and make that person's acquaintance. When I do, I'll strike something big, for nothing short of thousands would have induced Casimer Kane, otherwise Giles Barremore, to return to America."

"A gentleman wishes to see you, Mr. Carter," said a servant, at this moment, entering from the hall.

"What name did he give, John?"

"None, sir; said he was a stranger to you."

"Show him in here, John. Out of sight, boys."

Chick and Patsy at once withdrew behind some curtains, whence they could see and hear all which might take place between Nick and his visitor.

The latter was soon ushered into the detective's presence. He was a young man, with close-cropped, fair hair, and a full yellow beard, which covered his entire face.

"You are Mr. Carter, the detective, I presume?" he said, before Nick could say a word of greeting.

"Yes; and to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"One who has come back from the dead," was the queer reply.

"Indeed!"

"One who has been buried and experienced the novelty of the resurrection."

"And one who talks like a lunatic," coolly responded Nick, without taking his eyes off his visitor.

"No doubt of it," was the quick reply. "Nine men out of every ten would be a gibbering maniac had they gone through with what I have within the last year."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me your name before you go further into personal experience."

"With pleasure. My name is Brandt Luddington."

CHAPTER II.

BACK FROM THE GRAVE.

Nick Carter stared steadily at his visitor for nearly a minute after the latter announced his name. Then he invited the young man to be seated.

"I see you have considerable to tell me," said the detective, as Luddington accepted the proffered chair. "You are the subject of strange adventures?"

"So strange that I shall perhaps stagger your belief in the truth of what I will tell you, Mr. Carter."

"We shall see. But you haven't sought me out for the mere pleasure of relating your adventures, I presume?"

"Certainly not. I came to engage your professional services."

"To what end?"

"To discover, if you can, who plotted for my death, and what object my would-be murderers had, or have, in view. The universal belief that my body now lies

under a foreign sod thousands of miles away, food for worms, ought to make your work the easier."

"Who knows that you are alive?"

"No one who knew me as Brandt Luddington."

"Not even your father?"

"Especially not he."

"Suppose you put your story in as precise form as possible, Mr. Luddington."

"I will try," was the ready response, as the young man accepted a cigar from Nick.

Having lighted it, he related the following:

"I am my father's only child, and inherit from my dead mother a fortune of nearly a million dollars.

"Three years ago I concluded to take a trip around the world until I became tired of the life. Without any settled route or programme, I started out.

"I have two fads, which, with my income, I was enabled to gratify, as I went from place to place. One is painting, the other writing romance.

"Thirteen months ago I was in Buenos Ayres, South America. There I spent some time painting and writing.

"While I was there I died, or was supposed to have died.

"They said I committed suicide.

"I was found lifeless in my studio one morning, with an empty vial which had held poison on the floor at my side.

"There was evidence enough, it seems, for the authorities to decide that I had died from poison self-administered.

"So, without making much fuss over it, I was buried."

"Buried?" echoed Nick.

"Buried. That's it. Put under the ground. I told you in the start that I would startle you and try your credulity sorely. Yes, sir, they buried me, and had it not been for the professional zeal of two medical students, I should now be rotting beneath six feet of South American earth."

"They dug you up?"

"Thank God, yes! My body seemed to them a good subject for dissection. But the first touch of the cold steel in my nerves aroused my suspended animation. They were horrified to find life in the supposed corpse.

"With the true instincts of doctors, the two men set to work, and in time brought me back to life. Then they were between the devil and the deep sea.

"In Buenos Ayres grave robbing is a crime which is punished severely. They appealed to me to shield them. I could not do otherwise, since I owed them my life.

"Without betraying their secret, I left Buenos Ayres under an assumed name, taking passage in a ship for England.

"On the voyage across the Atlantic the vessel was wrecked. We were rescued by a ship bound for Australia, and carried to that place.

"The spirit of adventure was still strong in me, and I concluded to try roughing it for a while as a man without an income.

"But I soon tired of that and concluded to return to New York and to the enjoyment of my fortune.

"I arrived yesterday, and went to my father's office on Broadway.

"He wasn't in, and I soon discovered that his clerks didn't know me.

"After all, I should not have been surprised at it, for my appearance had been wholly changed after I left Buenos Ayres.

"Up to that time I wore no beard or mustache, and my hair grew long, falling almost to my shoulders.

"On board ship bound to Australia I never shaved. The result was this heavy beard, which pleased me so well I've never removed. But too much hair had a tendency to make me over conspicuous. Therefore I cut my hair close.

"The result is to almost absolutely disguise me, so that my most intimate friend will not know me.

"While talking to my father's clerks, I learned that his son Brandt had died more than a year ago in South America, and was buried there.

"Also, that his widow, whom he married at Buenos Ayres, had come on, and is now living with my father in Fifty-seventh street.

"That was the startling piece of news, Mr. Carter, which induced me to leave the office before my father could return, and which now brings me to seek your services."

"Do you mean that this professed widow of yours is a fraud, Mr. Luddington?" asked Nick.

"A fraud, and probably more."

"Humph! You mean your would-be murderer."

"The supposed successful attempt upon my life and the appearance of this false claimant looks as if she is the doubly guilty party."

"Don't you know who she is?"

"No. I've neither seen her nor know what she looks like."

"But do you not suspect who she may be?"

"Not in the slightest. I've cudgeled my brains, and recalled every woman I met in Buenos Ayres, without remembering one who could be made to answer."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Luddington, that whoever the woman is, she came well prepared for the role she is playing?"

"Eh?"

"Your father is a lawyer. He would not be easily satisfied by a poorly trumped-up claim. Without knowing differently, I should say he would take steps to satisfy himself as to whether or not his pretended daughter-in-law's claims were just."

"A year has elapsed since your supposed death—more than enough time for the prosecution of whatever investigation he might want to make."

"The fact that she is still under his roof indicates that he believes her claims to be just."

"As your widow, this woman would be entitled, by law, to one-third of your private fortune, which would be several hundred thousands of dollars."

"Without knowing, I will venture the prediction that she is playing for a higher stake."

"What?"

"Your entire fortune, perhaps. You say your father is himself a rich man."

"Therefore it seems natural that he might be induced to make over to his son's widow all that son's fortune, especially as the son received it from his mother."

Luddington stood up suddenly.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Carter. There is something of a very deep nature going on beneath my father's roof. The sooner we nip it the better."

"Let us not spoil everything by too much haste," cautioned Nick. "A plot of that daring nature and stupendous proportions cannot be compassed by a single move of the hand of the law. That woman is not alone in her work, depend upon it. We must reach her accomplices when we get ready to take her in."

"What would you do first?"

"Find out who she is, of course. You had acquaintances in Buenos Ayres, I presume?"

"Very few. The American consul and I became quite intimate, and I understand he had me decently buried and sent my effects to New York."

"But there were others?"

"Only passing acquaintances, with one exception. Nearly all the time I was in Buenos Ayres I was busy writing a novel and painting a picture. In painting the picture I had two models, who sat for me alternately—a man and a woman. Those two were the only persons who ever entered my apartments, except my landlady."

"And what of them?"

"The woman is dead. The man rather pleased me, and I took a fancy to him. I don't know what became of him."

"What was his name?"

"Giles Barremore."

Nick did not show the slightest mark of surprise at this name, though it was the same which Patsy reported was used by the man who lay dead at Bellevue Hospital.

The detective, not an hour before, in speaking to Chick and Patsy, had said:

"Nothing short of thousands would have induced Casimer Kane, otherwise Giles Barremore, to return to America."

And now he knew that it was a plot for thousands which did bring him back.

The directions in the dead man's hat indicated that in case of sudden death he wanted some one at Luddington's residence to know it.

That some one could be none other but the pretended widow.

Was she the L. Z. of the personal?

CHAPTER III.

TWO FACES IN A PICTURE.

Without indicating in any manner the interest he was taking in Luddington's narrative, Nick Carter continued to ask questions.

"What became of your effects, Mr. Luddington, after you, as was supposed, died at Buenos Ayres?"

"I presume they were sent to my father by the United States Consul. I never had a chance to inquire, but I'm positive some of my traps were sent to New York."

"Why are you positive?"

"Because I saw one of my Buenos Ayres belongings in this city yesterday."

"In your father's office?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"The picture which I was painting at the time."

"Painted from your two models?"

"Yes, but——"

"One moment. You told me your male model was this Giles Barremore, of whom

you spoke. Is his face, then, on the canvas?"

"It was when I last touched the picture. It is not now. I was about to speak of that fact when you interrupted me."

"Then go on. I'll hear what you have to tell of the picture."

"Well, I recognized the canvas, and the entire picture as soon as I saw it—all except the two faces."

"The two faces?"

"Yes, sir. Some one had erased the faces, or rather the features of both my models, and roughly substituted others in their places."

"Did you ever see faces like the substitutes?"

"None like the face of the woman. But the features put in place of Barremore's were very familiar, and gave me a great surprise."

"Indeed!"

"They were my own."

If Luddington expected Nick to show surprise at this information he was disappointed. His next question led away from the main subject, it seemed.

"Who saw this picture while you were painting it?"

"No one except the two models and the woman who cared for my room."

"What was her name?"

"Loloa Zonetta."

"Young?"

"Middle-aged."

Nick picked up the *Herald* from the table and showed Luddington the personal which had attracted his attention an hour before.

"What has this to do with the case?"

asked the young man, reading the advertisement a second time.

"It is signed L. Z."

"True."

"The initials of the woman who cared for your rooms in Buenos Ayres."

"Ha! Loloe Zonetta."

"Loloe Zonetta; yes."

"Who is C. K.?"

"Casimer Kane, her confederate."

"I never heard of him."

"Not by that name. You knew him as Giles Barremore."

"Great Scott! Are they both in New York?"

"Yes."

"Where? Do you know?"

"Not where Zonetta is. We may find her by means of that personal. I can lay my hands on your man, Barremore."

"Where is he?"

"I'll tell you later."

"But the woman who is in my father's house as my widow; can she be Loloe Zonetta?"

Nick smiled.

"Not by a jugful. I think you'll find that interesting person to be a younger and more attractive woman when you see her. You will doubtless recognize her instantly, too."

"Recognize her? Why?"

"By her resemblance to her picture."

Luddington's jaw dropped as he gazed hard at the detective. Something of the truth was dawning on his mind.

"The face substituted in my painting?"

"The same. There was method in the substitution of those faces, yours and hers. Don't you see? Proof of the marriage. Besides, Casimer Kane, or Giles Barre-

more, would never have let his picture be sent to the United States if he could have helped it."

"But I never saw the original of that picture in my life."

"Well, you will see it when you meet your widow."

Nick laughed, but Luddington began to show indignation.

"Let us denounce her at once," he exclaimed, striding across the room.

"And give everybody else in the plot a chance to escape? No! no! If we are to gather in the whole outfit we must move carefully."

"That personal, as you say, ought to trap the woman Zonetta."

"Perhaps. Then to get the rest——"

"The rest? How do you know there are others except Barremore?"

"She had help in deceiving your father. The help did not come from Barremore, nor yet from Loloe Zonetta. There are others, and I'm going to bag the whole set, if you'll aid me with your patience."

"Oh, I'll do that. Since waiting this long, I can wait longer. What am I to do?"

"Go to your hotel and stay there, without changing your appearance, where I can see you whenever it is necessary. Leave the rest to me."

"I'm at your service, Mr. Carter. But don't let my widow escape you."

"Leave that to me. Remain about your hotel for the rest of the day; I may want to see you this afternoon."

When young Luddington was gone, Chick and Patsy came from behind the curtains and sat down with Nick to talk over the strange chain of circumstances

which had been woven by three incidents: Nick's summons to Bellevue, the *Herald* personal and the visit of the man who had been buried.

"I'm going to take hold of this case and work it from the ground up," said Nick, who at once outlined his plans to his assistants.

"I shall need the help of Ida," said he. "Tell her to stay here in the house and be ready for orders, Chick. Pack a case of make-up material, and fetch it to me at the Everett House about four o'clock this afternoon."

"It's a daring plan, Nick," said Chick, shaking his head doubtfully.

"It will take a daring plan to round up that gang without losing a trick," was the reply.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S BOLD MOVE.

About two o'clock on the afternoon of the same day a smooth-faced man, apparently fifty years of age, and well dressed, called at the Everett House and sent his card to Walter Graham, Room 402. The card bore the name and address of:

WILBUR LUDDINGTON,
Attorney at Law,
246 Broadway.

The boy who took his card returned immediately with the reply that Mr. Luddington was to go right up to Room 402.

The lawyer found the occupant of Room 402 to be an elderly-appearing man, with long white hair, attired in black, and having the appearance of a minister of the gospel.

"You sent me this, I believe?" said

Luddington, handing a letter to Graham, no other than Nick Carter in a new disguise.

The latter glanced at the note, which merely said:

"I met your son Brandt, and supposing you might like to hear something about him previous to the unfortunate ending at Buenos Ayres, I drop you these few lines to say that I will be in my room at the Everett House till four o'clock this afternoon. If you will call, I may give you that which will be news concerning your son.
WALTER GRAHAM."

"Yes, I sent this note to you. Will you be seated, Mr. Luddington?"

"You met my unfortunate son in South America, then, Mr. Graham?" said the lawyer, showing great interest, as he sank into the proffered seat.

"I probably knew more about his doings while there than any other person save himself."

"You are probably aware, then, that he was married while at Buenos Ayres?"

"I was not. Indeed, I am confident he was not married at all."

"Then you didn't know as much about his affairs as you thought you did," smiled the lawyer.

"You may change your mind on that point, Mr. Luddington, before we part. I understand a young woman professing to be his widow has appeared and succeeded in some way in establishing her claim as his widow."

The lawyer did not attempt to conceal his growing interest in what Nick was saying.

"Yes," he replied. "She is now an inmate of my house."

"Has she been put into possession of your son's fortune?"

"Not all of it. I am making a final settlement, and will turn it all over to her in a few weeks."

"Being a lawyer, Mr. Luddington, I suppose you would not take such a step without the strongest proofs of her claims?"

"Certainly not. I don't know how they could be much stronger. I confess my suspicions were great at first, but they were all finally dissipated."

"Would you mind telling me what the proofs were?"

"First may I demand that you tell me why I should put such confidence in you, a stranger?"

"Because I am the best friend your son had, next to yourself, and because I am here to prove to you conclusively that the woman who represents herself as your son's widow is an arrant fraud."

The lawyer sprang to his feet in amazement.

"You mean it?" he gasped.

"Every word of it. If you will tell me how she imposed upon you so thoroughly, I'll give you proofs of her perfidy which you cannot reject or even doubt."

"As I said," replied Luddington, "I received her at first very suspiciously, though I was somewhat prepared for something of the kind."

"The American Consul at Buenos Ayres sent to me all the effects which my son left. Among them was——"

"The painting, which is in your office," interrupted Nick.

"You've seen it?" asked the lawyer, in surprise.

"I've heard of it. Her face and his are on the canvas?"

"Yes."

"Those faces are not the work of your son's brush, Mr. Luddington."

"Eh?"

"Somebody, between the time of his death and the discovery of his body, got into his studio, erased the features of the man and woman who had been his models, and substituted those of himself and this pretended widow."

"But this seems incredible!"

"Do not the faces on the painting suggest such hasty work?"

"Perhaps. The faces are crudely done, but I presumed they were unfinished—merely sketched in."

"Humph! Is that picture your only proof?"

"By no means. There was a letter left by him for me, acknowledging a secret marriage, confessing his disgust with life, announcing his intended suicide, and requesting me to see that his widow got what was her due as such."

Nick showed unusual interest in this part of the lawyer's statement.

"She produced such a letter?"

"No; it was sent by the consul with his other effects. I got it weeks before she came. The letter was upon the table beside which the body was found."

"A forgery, I suppose."

"No, I had experts examine it. The writing was my son's."

"Signed?"

"No; a signature was not necessary."

"Did it name the girl he had married?"

"No."

"What other proof have you?"

"Her marriage certificate."

"She produced such a document?"

"Yes, and has it still, showing her marriage to Brandt Luddington, a month before my son's death."

"But you didn't stop at that?"

"No. While I took her into my house and pretended to accept her as she offered herself, I secretly sent an envoy to Buenos Ayres to look up all the particulars officially."

"And he reported?"

"He reported everything to be as she represented, even to the return of an officially certified copy of the marriage record."

"Who was your agent?"

"My nephew, Philip Ferguson."

"Where is he?"

"Here in New York. He lives with me."

Nick seemed to give himself up to thought for a few moments. He was interrupted by Luddington, who said:

"Perhaps it is you, sir, who have been deceived."

"That is impossible, as I shall soon convince you."

"How?"

"By bringing you face to face with your son's most intimate friend."

Nick walked to a door connecting with an adjoining room, opened it, and Brandt Luddington walked into his father's presence.

The latter was plainly startled when Brandt stepped into the room, but a direct recognition on his part was not the result of the meeting.

"This young man," said Nick, "brings

you startling news. Can you stand the best kind of news, Mr. Luddington?"

"I—I—think so. What do you mean? My son—Brandt——"

"Did not die at Buenos Ayres, as reported, we have every reason to believe."

Luddington never took his eyes from the young man as he fairly gasped:

"Did not die! Why, what are you telling me?"

"Only that this young man saw him—was with him afterward. Has been with him very lately, indeed, this very day."

The lawyer's eyes fairly burned into the young man's face, and his breath was coming fast, while his face grew deadly pale.

Brandt's countenance began to beam with a tell-tale smile.

"Is it possible, Mr. Luddington, that you do not know your own son?"

That was all which was needed to complete the revelation. Father and son were instantly in each other's arms.

Half an hour's time was necessary to bring the situation to a calm, deliberative basis. Then the lawyer had to be informed of a good deal which has already been told. He also learned that the pseudo Graham was Nick Carter, the celebrated detective.

"Now," said Nick, after father and son gave him a chance to go on with facts in the case, "I want to know about that supposed letter to your father."

"I saw through that the moment I overheard father tell you about it. For once the experts were right. I wrote it."

"You wrote it?"

"Yes. It was two pages from the novel on which I was engaged when I met with

that accident. Though I had no intention of committing suicide, I fashioned my hero after myself, and the heroine after the lady who had been my model.

"This letter was on two separate sheets, and could easily be detached from the rest of the manuscript. By the way, father, was not the entire novel sent you?"

"I saw none of it—except those two sheets."

"Of course not," observed Nick. "The rest of the manuscript was destroyed by the same persons who plotted so well. There is one point which is not so plain, however," said Nick. "How could Philip Ferguson get a certified copy of a marriage return when there was no marriage return to be certified?"

Brandt flushed perceptibly at these words, but answered, promptly:

"I think I can explain that, too. I was married in Buenos Ayres."

"What?" cried the elder Luddington.

"It was a secret marriage to the lady who was my model, Madeline Parker."

"Where is she?"

"Poor girl! She died suddenly of heart disease soon after she heard I was dead."

"You're sure she died?" asked Nick.

"I satisfied myself on that point before I secretly left Buenos Ayres. She was almost alone in the city. My marriage to her was, I confess, a mistake, and I didn't grieve over her death as I should, perhaps."

"But the certificate which this woman brought to me, as well as the certified copy which Philip fetched back, bears the name of Lucille Zonetta," said the lawyer.

"Eh?"

Nick and the son both uttered the exclamation at once.

"Lucille Zonetta," muttered the detective. "Daughter of Loloe Zonetta, who took care of your apartments, no doubt. It is all coming out clearly."

"Then, after all, that personal signed L. Z. may have been inserted by the daughter, and the mother, Loloe, may not be in New York," suggested Brandt.

"I believe they are both here, and others with them. That certified marriage certificate has significance because it is fraudulent on its face."

"What does that signify?" asked the lawyer.

"It means that your nephew has either been deceived or has deceived you, Mr. Luddington."

"Good heavens! What a nest of vipers I've been living among these last months. I cannot trust myself to go into their presence."

"You must not go near them."

"But my absence may alarm them. She may get away and take the money which I have already turned over to her."

"I'll look after that. Mr. Luddington, could you trust your house and household to me for a few days?"

"I—what do you mean?"

"With your permission, I'm going to impersonate you while you keep out of the way."

At that moment Chick appeared with a huge hand-trunk.

Both Luddington and his son stared in amazement as the detective opened the hand-trunk, and began to assume a make-up which gradually but surely transformed

him into such a close double of the lawyer that it looked like magic.

"Now, if you'll exchange clothes with me," said Nick, "I guess I'll do as Wilbur Luddington, the lawyer. And if I don't get pretty well acquainted with the widow of Brandt Luddington and her select circle of friends, it will not be for want of opportunity."

Father and son were amazed at the boldness of the detective's scheme, and while both doubted Nick's ability to carry it out, neither offered serious objection to its trial.

For an hour or more, Nick questioned Luddington rapidly on scores of subjects, so as to inform himself on matters with which he would undoubtedly be confronted in his bold undertaking.

Among other things, he secured a clever understanding of the interior of the Luddington residence.

And at about eight o'clock that evening the counterfeit Wilbur Luddington admitted himself to No. — West Fifty-seventh street, while the real owner of the house was in possession of a suite of rooms at the Everett House, in company with his son, who had come back from the dead, as it were.

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERVIEW IN THE DARK.

Nick Carter, in his disguise as Lawyer Luddington, passed directly up-stairs and entered the owner's private room, all of which he was able to do without hesitation, by means of the directions he had taken of the interior of the residence.

A servant appeared almost as soon as he entered the room.

"Dinner has been waiting for you, sir," said the man, who was evidently the butler.

"I have dined," he replied, in a voice exactly like that of Luddington. "Have the rest been waiting?"

"No, sir. Mr. Philip did not come in, and Madame Lucille was served at the usual hour."

"Where is Lucille?"

"In her room, I think."

"Send her to me."

"Here, sir?"

"Yes, I am not feeling very well, tell her."

The man departed, and Nick sat down near the window, so as to put his face partly in the deep shadows. The gas had not been lighted, and Nick did not intend that it should be, at least until he had held his interview with the pretended widow.

Ten minutes passed before Lucille made her appearance. She opened the door softly, and crossed the threshold, evidently surprised to find the room dark.

"Are you here, Mr. Luddington?" came her words, in a voice which was beautifully modulated and sweet, as she hesitated and peered into the darkness.

"Come in and take this chair," was Nick's reply, pushing a chair toward her which he had selected for the purpose.

She left the door from the hall open, and, advancing, sank into the chair he had placed for her.

"Why do you sit in the dark?" she queried.

"I came in tired, and with a slight headache. I am going to retire early, but

before I go to bed I have something to say to you."

"If it is to urge me to decide whether I will marry you or not, do not press me for an answer to-night. Give me one week, and I will say positively then what my decision is."

This reply fairly stunned Nick, and was a revelation he was not prepared for.

So the elder Luddington had become infatuated with his son's supposed widow and had been pressing his suit.

The lawyer had not confessed his folly, either.

He probably was very glad of his lucky escape, after he heard the story of the young woman's crime, but had not the courage to acknowledge his weakness.

"It is not that I do not esteem you most highly, Mr. Luddington," she continued, when he made no response. "Indeed, I do like you, and I've no doubt could easily learn to love you as a true wife should, especially as you are dear Brandt's father. But there are several things confronting me which I want cleared away first. Then I'll reply at once and definitely."

"What are these things which stand in the way of your answer now?" Nick asked.

"I will tell you at the end of a week, whatever my answer is. Please don't ask me to tell you before, for I cannot."

"Nothing dishonorable?"

"No."

"Then a week let it be. I am going away to-morrow night. In a week I will return for my answer. While I am gone there will be a visitor in the house."

"A visitor?"

"Yes; a young woman like yourself."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is the same as my own—Madeline Luddington."

"Madeline Luddington?"

The words came almost in a gasp.

"She is the widow of a distant relative of the same name. I am going to look up some business for her in New Orleans, and while I am gone I have invited her to stay here. She will come around from the hotel to-morrow."

Nick hesitated a little, to give her a chance to say something, but she sat mute, and he went on:

"She knows nothing of my family affairs, but in a moment of recklessness I gave her to understand that I am married, and that she would be my wife's guest."

"Your wife's guest?"

"I confess I wanted to make her believe you are my wife. It will do no harm. When I return she will leave at once. Will you humor my whim in this instance and keep up the deception?"

"You have cause for it?"

"Perhaps I have."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you when I come back. It will be easy to get the servant to aid us in the little masquerade."

"And Philip!"

"Philip must fall in with the plan, too. He might amuse himself by making love to the widow—she's pretty."

Lucille gave a gasp, which was not one of surprise this time. It was a sound of jealousy, if Nick Carter ever heard such a female aspiration.

"Aha!" he thought. "The wind blows that way! I thought so."

"Is it a bargain?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Where is Philip?"

"He has gone to Boston."

"When will he be back?"

"To-morrow night."

"Then I'll not see him till I come back from New Orleans. You must inform him about Madeline. Now I think I'll ask you to excuse me. I'm going to retire, and be off to the office before you are up to-morrow. So I'll say good-by now."

He held out his hand, which she barely touched. Then she said good-night and swept from the room without another word.

Nick locked his door, but instead of going to bed, he sat smoking cigar after cigar in the dark, till nearly midnight, with no company but his thoughts.

When he at last undressed and went to bed, he said to himself:

"Well, if Ida don't have some fun with that woman, I shall miss my mark."

Before any of the servants were awake in the house next morning, Nick arose, dressed and left his room quietly, being careful to leave the room door open.

Then he went down-stairs without noise, and left the house.

He turned up at his own house in time for breakfast, after which he had a half hour's earnest conversation with his young lady assistant, Ida Jones, when he finally asked:

"Do you think you can carry it all out?"

She replied, without hesitation:

"I am sure I can. I should like nothing better than to try."

"Then success to you."

In the hall he met Chick, and gave a few words of instruction to him, after which he went down town to the lawyer's office.

He passed through the main room and merely nodded to the two clerks, who returned the salutation without showing the least suspicion that it was not the real Luddington to whom they spoke.

He passed on into the private office, and proceeded to make himself at home.

Scarcely had he seated himself at the lawyer's desk when one of the clerks stuck his head in through the door and said:

"Mayberry Brothers have telephoned to ask when you will be able to examine into the title of that Fourteenth street property for them."

"Tell them I am called to New Orleans on important business to-night, and it will have to be postponed till I come back," said Nick, and the clerk withdrew.

"I can't stay here longer than to establish the fact that the lawyer was at the office, or I'll run against a legal snag that will wreck me. I'll——"

He was interrupted by the door opening, and a woman entering without being announced.

He knew her as soon as his eyes met her face.

It was the same face which appeared in the picture which hung on the wall above the desk; the picture which came from Buenos Ayres.

It was Lucille Luddington, or the woman who called herself by that name.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO IDA.

This unexpected appearance of the swindler in petticoats would have discomposed almost any man in Nick Carter's peculiar predicament except the great detective himself.

It was the last thing in the world he would have asked to happen just then, for he realized that if anybody could penetrate his disguise it would be this woman, who had seen him the night before in a dim light, but now had daylight to aid her.

Still, he was not disconcerted, though he realized that if he could pass through this interview with her unsuspected, it might result to his gain, for she certainly had a well-defined object in making this unexpected call.

Without showing surprise at her entrance, Nick said:

"Ah, good-morning, Lucille. To what am I indebted for this early call? Take this seat."

Nick arose from the chair at his desk and motioned her toward it.

She sat down and Nick stood before her.

The adventuress attempted to scan his face with a look which convinced Nick that she was not altogether satisfied of her ground. But his glance into her face was so steady that it seemed to either drown her remote suspicions or confuse her, for she soon dropped her eyes.

Nick was aware that the only way she could detect the deception of his make-up would be either by some betraying words or by a slight difference in the color of his and Luddington's eyes.

He, however, stood so that direct light would not strike his face, and he meant to be guarded in everything he said to her.

"I came down to see you before you should leave for New Orleans," she said, "and also to make a proposition."

"I am ready to hear the proposition," said Nick. "What is it?"

"Last night I told you I could not give my answer about marrying you in less than a week. I have changed my mind."

She suddenly looked up and met Nick's gaze.

"Changed your mind?" he replied, without showing any excitement. "Favorably to me?"

"I will give my answer now—before you go away. I will marry you on two conditions.

"One is that the marriage takes place right away, to-day. The other is that before you ask me to take the marriage vows, or immediately afterward, you place in my hands the entire portion of your late son's—my dead husband's—property."

"But I can't do that. It is not in my power to convey the property so quickly, as you should know."

"Not the property," she replied, "but its equivalent. You have given me my widow's third, one hundred thousand dollars. There are two hundred thousand dollars left. You can command that much cash before the close of banking hours to-day, for you are rich. I will quit claim all rights to your son's estate when you do so."

Nick seemed to ponder over the proposition, and she watched him from beneath her eyelashes.

"I am not in a condition to do it, Lucille—not now. I have promised to go to New Orleans, and cannot honorably get out of it. But if you'll leave the proposition open till I come back and give me two or three days to raise the two hundred thousand dollars, I'll accept your offer."

She did not seem to be very much disappointed with the reply.

"That means in about ten days?" she said.

"Just about."

"All right. It simplifies matters at the house, too. I can the better pass as your wife to this Mrs. Luddington, since I so soon shall be. It is a bargain then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll say good-by. Don't consider me bold if I say it as should your promised wife."

Before Nick fairly realized what she meant, she came quickly up, kissed him, and turning, left the office.

"I can't make out whether she suspects or not," he muttered, as the door closed and he pulled himself together. "If she did she might easily have satisfied herself by a tug of my wig or false eyebrows."

"I'll go home and find out where she goes from here."

Bidding his clerks look well after the affairs of the office, and tell all clients he would be back in a week, Nick left the building, ostensibly to get ready for his New Orleans trip, but really to go to his home and change his disguise, so as to impersonate another important character.

Before he had accomplished the change Chick came in on him.

"She went right back to the house," said Chick, before Nick could ask a question. "Patsy says she stopped nowhere on the way."

"And is there now?"

"Yes."

"How about Ida?"

"You mean Mrs. Madeline Luddington?" laughed Chick. "Oh, she has just taken a carriage and gone to Luddington's house, too. You should have seen the style in which the New Orleans widow is gotten up, Nick."

"Well, she'll soon bring the Buenos Ayres widow to bay," smilingly answered Nick, as he went on with his make-up.

Chick watched him carefully a while before he said:

"That's somebody else you are counterfeiting, Nick?"

"Right you are, lad."

"Anyone I know?"

"Guess you never met him. But I used to know him as I knew my brother."

"Who?"

"Casimer Kane."

"The fellow lying dead at Bellevue?"

"Hum!"

"As he'd really look without the disguise he wore when he was taken to the hospital?"

"That's it."

"What do you intend to do as his double?"

"Going to call on the widow from Buenos Ayres."

"Nick, you are playing it high."

"Have to, my boy. Ida will work her up till I get there, and as Casimer Kane I'll bring on the climax. When we get through with her she'll be ready to turn her confederates over into our hands, whether willing or not. Is Patsy on guard?"

"Yes. No one can go in or out of the Luddington house without being seen by him."

"Good. I'm going to take a nap for two hours. Have me called at the end of that time."

When Nick Carter, in the guise of the great criminal, Casimer Kane, entered the house of Lawyer Luddington that afternoon he inquired for Mrs. Luddington, and sent up a card on which was written "C. K., Buenos Ayres."

The servant who took it had not been up-stairs a moment until she came flying down again in a terrible state of fright.

Nick rushed out into the hall and met the frightened maid at the foot of the steps.

"What is the matter?" he said, seizing her by the shoulder and checking her wild flight.

"I—I—don't know," she chattered.

"But Madame Lucille is not in her room, and——"

"Well?" urged Nick, giving her a shake as she stopped to shudder.

"There's a strange woman, half-dressed, lying on the floor—oh, Lord! I guess she's dead!"

Nick let go of the girl's shoulder, and went flying up-stairs, three steps at a leap, muttering:

"It's Ida. The she-devil somehow has outwitted her."

He made his way to the door of a rear room on the second floor, which he knew to be that occupied by the false widow.

The sight which greeted him as he passed the threshold was not wholly a surprise.

Ida lay stretched upon the floor, but not dead. She lay on her side, and both eyes were wide open.

Her outside clothes had been stripped from her person. Both arms and ankles were securely bound, and a gag was in her mouth.

Nick lost no time in releasing her.

As Ida got up, rubbing her mouth with one hand and looking very sheepish, Nick asked:

"What does this mean, Ida?"

She recognized his voice, and giving him a glance of expressive satisfaction, replied:

"It means that I am a blockhead, I am afraid."

"Where's your clothes?"

"Last I saw of them my hostess had them on going out of that door."

Nick could not help laughing.

"I deserve it," said Ida.

"But, Nick, that woman is my game. If you don't leave her to me, I shall feel like resigning my position as your assistant."

"All right, Ida. She shall be your mark. There come the servants. You borrow some of Mrs. Luddington's clothes

in place of those she took from you. I'll keep them quiet, meanwhile."

When Nick and Ida left the house they soon realized that some one was following them.

It was Patsy, as Nick knew, and the detective chuckled.

Ida wore the clothes which the adventuress had laid aside. Patsy failed to recognize Nick in his disguise, and he thought he was on a hot trail.

To the amusement of Nick and Ida, and to Patsy's complete confusion, the boy followed them to Nick's own house, and saw them enter.

"I guess the gang is going to give themselves up, or I'm a guy from Guytown," muttered Patsy, as he followed his game into Nick Carter's library, where he was chagrined to realize how he had been taken in and had let the swindler in petticoats walk away from before his eyes dressed in Ida's clothes.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

This is what occurred when Ida went to Lawyer Luddington's house.

She sent up her card, "Mrs. Madeline Luddington," to "the lady of the house."

Lucille came down herself and greeted Ida most graciously.

"My husband told me you were coming, but the servants have not yet completed the preparation of your rooms. Will you not come with me to my private parlor till they are ready?"

Ida followed her intended victim upstairs to the room where Nick afterward found her. Lucille relieved her of her wraps, and the two young women sat down face to face, each secretly studying the other.

"Your baggage will be along presently, I suppose?" queried Lucille.

"Oh, yes. It will be forwarded from the hotel this afternoon."

"You will stay a week, I believe."

Ida elevated her eyebrows and replied:

"A week? Why, I expect to make Mr. Luddington's house my home."

"Oh, do you?" was the rather unconcerned response. "My husband said you would be here only a week. You're related to him, I think he said—distantly?"

"I am his daughter-in-law."

Lucille stared at Ida for some seconds; then she said:

"Why, I thought he had but one son."

"So he had, my husband, Brandt Luddington, who died at Buenos Ayres thirteen months ago."

"You were with him when he died, I presume?" was the cool, unconcerned answer.

Ida stared at this female puzzle before her and answered:

"Oh, no. He left me in New Orleans when he went to South America."

"You are from New Orleans, I believe?"

"Yes; we were married there. I presume your husband told you why he was going to New Orleans?"

"He said he was called there on business. I didn't ask him what it was," came the bored reply.

"Well, you see," said Ida, "as his son's widow, I will get a widow's share of my husband's fortune, which your husband controls. But before he will pay it over to me he insists on going to New Orleans to investigate our marriage personally."

"He would not even accept my marriage certificate as evidence."

"You showed him your certificate of marriage, then?" yawned Lucille.

"Why, yes. Maybe you'll not be so hard to convince," said Ida, drawing a paper from the bosom of her dress, and handing it to Lucille.

The latter glanced it over, handed it back, and said:

"It seems to be all right."

The document which Ida gave her was really a marriage certificate issued some years before at New Orleans.

It was among Nick's effects when he laid his plan in this case, and by the use of acids he had removed the original dates and names and written in a date corresponding to a time when Brandt Luddington was in New Orleans, and substituted the names of Luddington and Madeline Parker, the girl Brandt married in Buenos Ayres.

If the certificate interested the adventuress, she did not show it.

"I heard that Brandt Luddington died in Buenos Ayres," she said, as Ida watched her from a corner of her eye.

"Heart disease, I believe?"

"No; they said it was suicide. I've found out it was murder."

"Mercy! How horrible! Murdered? By whom?"

"By the woman of whom he rented his room, and her confederate, a man who sat for him as a model. This man went by the name of Barremore down there. His real name was Casimer Kane, and he had fled from New York years ago."

"Surprising story. How did you find this out?"

"Mr. Luddington told me. He employed that great detective, Nick Carter, to investigate his son's death. This detective not only discovered that Brandt was poisoned, but that the woman who did it and her confederate, Barremore, are now in New York hiding somewhere."

"I am surprised," was Lucille's answer. She was still effecting an unconcern most natural except that Ida noticed a slight paleness stealing over her face.

"I am surprised," she said, in even tones, "that Mr. Luddington should not have told me this and yet confided it to you."

"It is not so strange, after all. I am Brandt's widow, and he might not want

to worry his wife with such unpleasant knowledge."

"But he has scarcely acknowledged you as his son's widow," came the response, to Ida's small annoyance.

"That is so, yet the story is true, I assure you."

"I think your room is ready by this time. Will you go to it?"

Ida assented and arose. As she stood up, Lucille dropped her handkerchief. It fell on the end of a narrow rug upon which Ida stood.

With a pretense of picking up the handkerchief, the adventuress stooped, grasped the end of the rug in both hands, and gave it a vicious jerk.

Before Ida realized what her danger was, her heels were jerked from beneath her and she fell with stunning force upon the hardwood floor.

Lucille lost none of her opportunity, and before Nick's young lady assistant could collect her half-stunned faculties, the wicked Lucille struck her over the temple with a heavy substance which deprived her entirely of her senses.

When she revived she was stripped of her outer clothing, and was lying bound and gagged upon the floor.

Lucille was coolly exchanging her own dress for that which she had stripped from Ida.

"Hello!" she calmly exclaimed, as Ida opened her eyes. "That was a hard fall you had, Mrs. Brandt Luddington. These hard wood floors are so slippery.

"I am going to borrow your togs for a few days. There's a fellow outside watching the house. I think he must be one of the assistants of that devilish smart fellow you call Nick Carter, for he followed me here a while ago.

"I don't care to be bothered by these detectives, so I'll just make him believe it is you who is going away.

"As you've come to get Brandt Luddington's one hundred thousand dollars, I

might just as well tell you not to bother, for I have it here."

She displayed a roll of one thousand-dollar bills, and then concealed them in a large false pocket of an inner skirt.

"I feared I might be called away suddenly, you see, and had the money put into the most convenient form for carrying.

"There is an individual personating your father-in-law, and it's the best make-up double I ever saw.

"He was here last night, and I saw him this morning.

"My suspicions were first aroused when I found on visiting his room this morning that he had smoked numerous cigars last night.

"I thought it strange, for Mr. Luddington never smokes tobacco, for the smell of it makes him sick.

"Then I visited him at the office, and was more convinced when I kissed him. I saw the connection of the wig to the head, but I had to kiss him in order to get near enough to be sure.

"I'm certain the man I kissed was not as old as Luddington. I've had experience in kissing men, and consider myself an expert. So much so that I could almost tell a man's age in the dark by kissing him.

"Shouldn't wonder one bit if it was your friend, the clever Nick Carter.

"Well, after kissing him, I'd be ashamed to meet him again, or my husband, either.

"So I'll quietly disappear.

"Tell them not to look for me. They'll have no more chance to find me than they will to run across this Kane and his female accomplice you were telling me about."

By this time she had all Ida's clothes on, and stood at the door looking back at the helpless Ida.

"Well, ta, ta! When you get tired lying

there just get up or ring for a servant. I'm off."

And she shut the door, leaving Ida alone in her dilemma.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK SETS A TRAP.

Such was the account which Ida gave to Nick and his other assistants of her adventures at the house of Lawyer Luddington.

"This swindler in petticoats is a cool one, and game as they make 'em, Nick," commented Patsy.

"And very beautiful," added the detective. "She has inherited each characteristic."

"Eh?"

"Beauty from her mother, and nerve and cunning from her father."

"You mean Casimer Kane?"

"Yes. Lucille is undoubtedly his daughter. When he skipped from New York he left a wife and a little girl behind. They soon afterward disappeared also. I remember seeing Mrs. Kane once, and she was a very beautiful woman. If my memory serves me right this Lucille looks something like the mother looked then, though much handsomer."

"Then the mother must have been a stunner."

"She was."

"And you believe Loloa Zonetta, who rented rooms to Brandt Luddington, was Mrs. Casimer Kane?"

"Undoubtedly. She is in New York hiding. Her daughter is no doubt with her. They are expecting Kane, or Barremore, and don't know he's dead."

"And do you think they'll now get away as quickly as possible?"

"No; I think they'll lay low—probably relying on some good disguise, and wait for things to blow over," said Nick.

"Well, how will you get at them?" queried Chick.

"I'm going to reply to that *Herald* personal," was Nick's answer.

The detective took the slip out of his pocket and read it again.

"If C. K. is in the city, why does he not communicate with L. Z. at once?"

Then he sat down at his desk and wrote:

"L. Z.—Have lost your address. Meet me to-day at noon, sharp, in front of *Herald* Building, Thirty-fifth street side.

"C. K."

"Put that in to-morrow morning's *Herald*," he said to Chick.

"Thunder, Nick. You don't expect them to bite at that. They'll smell a trap right away."

"That's right. They'll scent a trick, but they'll bite all right. L. Z. wouldn't miss a chance to see what it means for a good deal."

"And are you going there made up as Kane?"

"That's what I am, my boy, and all three of you will be on hand to watch the crowd, or help me do it.

"Meanwhile, I'll just cover up my smooth Casimer Kane face with a full beard, and go round to see Luddington and son."

"Nick," exclaimed Chick, as the detective arose to go, "what will you do with Philip Ferguson when he comes back from Boston?"

"He is already back from Boston."

"How do you know?"

"Because he never went to Boston. I am satisfied that he is here in New York, being used by Lucille and her gang to further their schemes. If I'm not off the track, Ferguson, by his love for this pretty adventuress, is wholly in her power, and I have reason to believe she is quite as much wrapped up in him as he is in her.

"When we find Loloa and Lucille, we'll probably find Luddington's nephew, Ferguson."

Nick went at once to the Everett, where

he found father and son chafing under their enforced restraint.

"Mr. Luddington," he said to the elder, "I shall now release you, and let you go about your business in your proper person."

This very much pleased the lawyer.

Nick then sat down and told the Luddingtons all that had happened, and, of course, he never had more interested listeners in his life.

"What a little devil she is!" muttered Luddington, the elder.

"Yet you wanted to marry her," smiled Nick.

"Don't mention that folly," pleaded the lawyer, flushing and holding up his hand. "She must have bewitched me."

"Well, you made a narrow escape; had it not been for your nephew she would have had you in her trap ere this."

"You mean would have married me?"

"Yes, and had all of Brandt's property in her possession."

"What had Ferguson to do with it?"

"She fell in love with him, and, besides, I imagine he has another hold over her. You sent him to South America to investigate her claims of widowhood. He came back and confirmed them—even brought a certified copy of the certificate of marriage. Had they met much before Ferguson went to Buenos Ayres?"

"They were both inmates of my house for nearly two months before he made the trip."

"Then that was enough. They had time to form a partnership. But why did you wait so long before you sent Ferguson on that mission?"

"I first wrote to the American Consul at Buenos Ayres. His answer was not satisfactory, and I sent Philip to make a personal investigation."

Turning to Brandt, Nick asked:

"Did you never know, while occupying Madame Zonetta's rooms, that she had a daughter—this Lucille?"

"No. She told me she had but one child, a boy of fifteen."

"Oh, ho! And this boy?"

"I never saw him. She said he was at school most of the time."

"Well, the boy at school (in her mind) was Lucille. If you didn't see her I'll bet a cool thousand she saw you often. You never dreamed that your model, Barremore, was Madame Zonetta's husband?"

"Why, certainly not. Neither ever hinted such a thing. I didn't even know they were acquainted."

"I imagine you talked a good deal about yourself to one or the other," observed Nick.

"No, I can't say that I did."

"Humph! Ever happen to mention that the novel you were engaged on drew on your own life for incidents?"

"I think I did, now that you speak of it. I talked considerable to Barremore while he was sitting for me, and I remember he asked me once where I got my characters for the story. I replied that the main male character was as nearly copied after myself and my own life as possible."

"That will do. The rest is plain. When you were absent from your rooms this man or the Zonettas read and studied the manuscript of the novel, and so learned your history and expectations. The plot followed."

"A daring plot it was, too," declared the lawyer.

"Well, yes. They were playing for a million or more."

"A million? Brandt's property is not worth over three hundred thousand dollars."

"But you possess more than twice as much."

"I? Yes; but what——"

"Be certain that they would not have let that get away if they had had time to complete their plans," interrupted Nick.

"If your son had not escaped by the

miracle which snatched him from the grave, both his and your fortune would have been in their hands before this year ended, and you, sir, would have followed your son."

"Good God? Poisoned!" gasped the lawyer.

"Rather drugged into the appearance of death, and buried alive, as he was. In that way no trace of poison could be discovered in case of a post mortem, and the post mortem would, if performed, answer the same purpose as burial alive."

The lawyer shuddered, and Brandt turned pale.

"Luckily for you both," continued Nick, "and unfortunately for them, they did not hold a post mortem examination on the son at Buenos Ayres."

"What an escape!" said Luddington.

"And now," went on Nick, "we must be alive and round up the gang. We must not only capture the whole outfit, but recover the one hundred thousand dollars which they already have."

"Yes, easily said," smiled Brandt, "but how?"

"Follow my directions, both of you, and I guess it will come out all right. You, Mr. Luddington, can resume your own clothes, which will be here presently. Then you can go to your house and office and announce that you've changed your mind about the trip to New Orleans. Then go about your business as if everything was just as you expected it to be."

Turning to Brandt, Nick said:

"I suppose, of course, you'd know Barremore, or Kane, if you saw him here in New York?"

"Why, certainly, if he is not disguised."

"Well, then, I want you to be in Herald Square to-morrow at precisely noon. When the bronze figures on top of this building strike twelve there will be the usual crowd around to see and hear. Search carefully in that crowd for Casi-

mer Kane, otherwise your man, Barremore."

"Why, you certainly cannot have any assurance that he will be in the crowd."

"I think I can promise that you'll find him there."

"And if I do?"

"Go right up to him and make yourself known."

"And have him arrested?"

"By no means. Don't even hint that you know he had anything to do with your South American adventure."

"Why, I don't suppose he'd recognize me in this beard," said Brandt.

"If he doesn't, you must make yourself known."

"Well, I'll do as you say, but——"

"That's right; leave the rest to me."

"After I've done talking to him, what then?"

"Go about your business."

"And not follow him to see where he goes?"

"Not for all you are worth. Don't fail to be on hand. I'm off."

That evening Nick had another conference with Chick, Patsy and Ida. At its conclusion he said:

"And if I'm not mistaken, there will be a little drama among that crowd in front of the Herald Building at noon to-morrow."

"That's so, Nick, and the two bronzed men over the front door of the building, whom Minerva commands to tell the hour, will not make the only strike in that neighborhood," commented Patsy.

Nick smiled.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER IN IRONS.

Nick Carter's plan to pick up the trail of his game, which had been lost, was unique and most ingenious.

Of course, he knew that C. K. had not, and would not, answer L. Z.'s personal

in the *Herald*. He was equally certain that L. Z. having inserted the personal, would each morning scan the personal column of the same paper, hoping therein to find a reply.

He was also confident, as he had expressed himself, that L. Z., whoever L. Z. was, would suspect that the second personal was inserted by an impostor, because L. Z. would know, as well as he knew, that Casimer Kane would never appoint such a conspicuous meeting-place in broad daylight, even if there were not other reasons why the great criminal would not ask for such a meeting.

He, however, knew that L. Z. or L. Z.'s friends, would not miss the opportunity to be present at the place and time, probably well disguised, to try to find out what the game was.

He intended once more to assume Kane's double as he used it before. Of course, his strong resemblance to the real Casimer Kane, as he made up from his own recollection of that person in life, and his study of the man's dead face at the hospital, would attract L. Z.'s attention.

L. Z. would see Brandt come up and address him; L. Z. would be consumed by curiosity with what happened, and would follow one or the other.

He meant that it would not be he who would be followed, and had arranged to make assurance doubly sure, as will be seen.

Then L. Z. would follow Brandt Luddington. At least that mysterious person could not possibly, he argued, fail to fall under the watchful eyes of one of his three trusted assistants, who would be in the crowd scanning the people there. Once spotted, the rest would be easy.

The usual twelve o'clock crowd were gathered around the little square in front of the Herald Building, at the junction of Broadway and Sixth avenue, next day,

waiting for the bronze figures to strike the hour on the big bell.

A few minutes before twelve the figure of a man whom any one acquainted with Barremore, late of Buenos Ayres, would have sworn was he, pushed his way through the crowd till he fetched up against the iron fence on Thirty-fifth street.

He backed up against the fence, and slouching his hat down over his eyes, anxiously began to scan the people around him, instead of watching the bronze figures above.

None but his assistants in all that crowd knew it was the great detective in disguise, but there were two others who, while not knowing the masquerader's identity, were sure he was an imposter.

There was one in that crowd, however, who was ready to swear it was the real Casimer Kane. That one was Brandt Luddington. The make-up was so good that the lawyer's son could have sworn it was the man he had known at Buenos Ayres as Barremore.

As soon as he caught sight of the disguised detective, he exclaimed, under his breath:

"Well, hang me, if the detective didn't know what he was talking about. It's Barremore, as sure as I'm alive, and he's looking for some one, I guess.

"Well, I've got nothing to do but to carry out Carter's orders. Won't I give my old model a jolly surprise, though?"

Edging his way through the crowd, Brandt came up to Nick's side, and slapping him on the shoulder, said:

"Hello, old fellow! I'm jolly glad to see you, though I never expected to find you in this quarter of the world."

Nick pretended to be greatly surprised, and somewhat startled, when Brandt slapped him on the shoulder. But after looking the young man in the face, and hearing him speak, he said, rather stiffly:

"I guess you are mistaken, sir. I don't know you."

"Oh, no, I'm not mistaken, and I don't blame you for not recognizing me with this beard. You surely haven't forgotten Brandt Luddington, Barremore?"

The start which Nick gave was so natural that it perfectly satisfied Brandt, who was expecting it. But he pretended to pull himself together somewhat and replied:

"You are surely mistaken. My name is not Barremore, and I never knew any one of the name you mention."

Before Brandt could reply, an unexpected interruption took place—unexpected to both men.

A tall, slim, dark-complexioned man, dressed in black, and about thirty years old, who had been elbowing his way through the crowd, seized Nick's hand and said, rapidly, in a low tone:

"I am delighted to find you, Zonetta, for I could not find Lucille, and was all at sea. I only arrived this morning, and sent directly to the house, but she wasn't there. They said she had gone away for good, but didn't know where. I saw you accidentally. What's up? Anything gone wrong?"

Nick realized that this was an accidental ten-strike, and though he didn't know his man he knew it was one of the band of local conspirators who had just arrived from South America.

He had asked for Lucille, otherwise the daughter of Kane, who in Buenos Ayres was known as Zonetta to everyone but Brandt, to whom he was Barremore.

Nick didn't let go of the fellow's hand while the latter was so busy saying so much in a breath, but as soon as the stranger stopped, he turned away and said, a little above a whisper:

"Not so loud. We can't talk here. I'm afraid I'm watched. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Marlborough, over there."

"I'll see you there in a few hours. Now, break away."

Nick left the stranger just as the Herald figures finished their mid-day act, and the crowd began to disperse.

Brandt watched both men—Nick as he worked his way over toward Sixth avenue, and the stranger as he walked off toward Broadway.

"I've seen that tall, slim fellow in Buenos Ayres sure. But where I—ah, yes. It's the man I've seen lounging around her house so much. Teaching her son French, she said, I believe. Hum!"

Something attracted his attention toward the direction Nick had taken. He turned to see a crowd gathering near the southeast corner of the Herald Building. There was a struggle between the man he supposed was Barremore and two men in citizen's clothes.

By the time he reached the crowd he found handcuffs upon the counterfeit Barremore, and the two men pushing their prisoner through the crowd.

"What's up?" he asked, of a policeman in uniform, who just came up.

"I don't know. Them's two of Superintendent Byrnes' headquarter men, and they got a crook in the crowd, I guess."

The policeman looked at Brandt, and asked:

"You're a reporter, ain't you?"

Brandt nodded.

"Well, there's big game in that pull, I think," said the officer, lowering his voice. "I don't mind giving you a tip, if you don't give me away, and are willing to whack up on a good beat."

"But how do I know it'll be a beat?"

"If it isn't, you don't need to whack; see? This is my beat. You'll know where to find me."

"Well, it's a go."

"I've been on the force sixteen years, and I think I recognize that man. If it's the one I think it is, he is wanted for one

of the biggest robberies ever perpetrated. It occurred on Grand street, twelve years ago. There comes the roundsman. I'm off."

Brandt turned and walked down Broadway, wondering where Nick Carter was during all this time. He didn't suspect that it was the great detective whom Byrnes' two trusted detectives were leading to the nearest station house in handcuffs.

But the detectives and Nick had a perfect understanding. So had the officers at the station-house.

A big crowd followed and saw Nick searched; watched him as he stood mute when questioned. Saw the sergeant put the name on the slate as "John Doe," and the charge "suspicion."

They then saw the supposed desperate criminal marched back to the cell-room to be locked up, as they supposed.

CHAPTER X.

IDA AS A JANITRESS.

More had come into the net than Nick expected. The tall, slim, dark man was a factor not counted upon. The detective was more than ever pleased with that incident, and he knew that the man who had shaken his hand and mistaken him for Zonetta, otherwise Kane, had fallen under the watchful eye of either Chick or Patsy, and would not escape.

It was not Nick's wish to be followed, and about the only place to which he was sure he could go and not be tracked into his seclusion was the station-house. Hence he had arranged with Superintendent Byrnes and two detectives from headquarters for the mock arrest.

Nor was it his intention to be locked up at the station-house and lose any valuable time. Everything had previously been arranged with the official at that place.

There was a private door leading into

the captain's room from the cell corridors, and the detective passed directly into the former.

Material to change his disguise completely had been left there, and when he emerged no one would have recognized in the elderly man with white beard and stooped shoulders the prisoner who fifteen minutes before had been led back to the cell, and who was registered as John Doe.

Nick left the station-house by a rear way, and went directly to a room at the St. James, where he had arranged to meet his assistants.

Ida was there when he came in.

"Alone?" he asked, looking around.

"Yes. I've been here half an hour. There was nothing for me to do. Patsy and Chick have the work in tow."

"Ah! Then the boys struck a trail?"

"Each of them struck a trail. Patsy followed the man you shook hands with, and Chick went after Brandt Luddington."

"After young Luddington? Why?"

"Because some one else followed Luddington."

Nick nodded his head and smiled.

"Who was it?"

"A rather handsome, medium-sized, dark-complexioned man, of stylish dress."

"Well, what else?"

"There was another party whom I had picked out to follow—a slightly-built young fellow, about fifteen years old, who was with the fellow who followed Brandt.

"This boy did not accompany the other one, and I had made up my mind that he was my especial charge, seeing that Patsy had singled out the Marlboro guest, when something happened."

"Humph! The boy also followed the man to the Marlboro?" said Nick.

"Yes. So Patsy had them both in tow. I watched them all three enter the hotel. Presently the boy came out and walked up

Broadway. I saw Patsy following, so I came down here to wait."

Before another word could be spoken the door opened and Chick came in.

"Got your game under cover, eh?" said Nick, as soon as Chick closed the door.

"Sure. I left Patsy on guard."

"Oh, yes! You both fetched up at the same burrow. Naturally, since the game of each belonged to one covey."

Chick nodded.

"Right, Nick. When my game took to cover, I found Patsy on watch near by, having tracked his charge into the same entrance ten minutes before. So I left him on watch and came to report."

"That's right. You followed the man who tracked Brandt Luddington?"

"Yes."

"Where did Luddington go?"

"First to your house."

"But he wasn't admitted?"

"No; I suppose John told him you were not in, and would not be in."

"Then where did he go?"

"To his father's residence."

"The devil! And this man followed him to both places?"

"Yes. But he got into his father's house. That seemed to satisfy the fellow following him, for he set off, and went directly to an apartment house on West Thirty-sixth street."

"Same one Patsy traced the boy to?"

"Yes. The boy entered first. He got in by ringing one of the bells on the right-hand side."

"Which one?"

"He wasn't close enough to be sure."

"Well," commented Nick, "that proves that some one was already in the flat to hear the boy's ring."

"But my man let himself in with a key," said Chick.

"Which proves that he lives there," said Nick. "Now then, Chick, go and bring the janitor of those flats here right

away. And don't let anybody get on to what you are after."

As soon as Chick was gone, Nick said to Ida:

"Step into the adjoining room and wait till I need you."

"Remember your promise, Nick," said the girl, as she arose to obey. "I am to have that Lucille when the round-up comes."

"You have my promise, Ida."

Chick was gone half an hour when he returned he had a heavy-set young Irishman in charge.

"This is your man, Nick."

The Irishman made an awkward bow.

"Sit down, my man. I have sent for you to do a public service and also to put you in the way of making several hundred dollars."

"Thank ye, sor. It's not Pat Donovan as will refuse to airn that much money in a dacent and honorable way."

"Oh, we shall not ask you to do anything an honest man will be afraid of. I am Nick Carter. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

The Irishman arose and bowed twice, with awkward sincerity, as he exclaimed:

"Heered av ye, is it? Faith, who has not heerd av Nick Carther in New York, especially the rogues? Not that I'm wan av thim, though."

"But you have a rogue and a criminal in your building, and I want you to help me land him in prison."

"The saints purtect us! What is it ye are tellin' me? A criminal in the Kady Flats! Worra! Who kin it be?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Sure an' I can't, though. I never dreamed that the Kady sheltered any wan but an honest person."

"Describe your man, Chick," said Nick.

Chick gave a hasty but complete description of the man who had followed Brandt Luddington from Herald Square.

Pat Donovan sat listening with open mouth, and amazement all over his honest face.

"Howly St. Patrick preserve us!" he gasped. "Why, that's the Senor Silverman!"

"Who is Senor Silverman?"

"A paintin' gintleman, sor, who lives on the fourth flure all alone by himself."

"How long has he been there?"

"Goin' on to siven months now. An' he's sich a quiet, good tinnint, too."

"Well, your Senor Silverman is as great a rogue as is out of Sing Sing, Donovan, and we want him."

"The Lord save us, sor! I'd never have thought it. But if you do be sayin' so, Misther Carther, I know it's true."

"Thank you. Now, Donovan, does he have any visitors?"

"There do be a young fellow livin' with him timporarily since yisterday—a nevvie, I believe he told my wife, Bridget. An' he do have a gintleman and lady come to see him now and thin. He be paintin' for them, Bridget tells me. The man stays all night sometimes, but the lady always goes after an hour or two, av coorse."

"Your wife, Bridget, is acquainted with the painter, then?"

"Sure, she do take care of the gintl - man's apartments. At least, she takes his breakfast, dinners and suppers to him ivery day, from the restaurant on the avenue."

Nick wrinkled his brow at this information—a sure sign, as Chick knew, that a sudden idea had taken possession of his brain.

"What time does your wife take his supper to him?"

"At siven, sor, ivery noight. She goes up and gits the urther about half an hour before, an' goes back for the dishes an hour afterward."

"Can you bring your wife here without

arousing anybody's curiosity, Mr. Donovan?"

"I can, sor. When do ye want Bridget to come?"

"Right away."

"Then right away it will be, sor."

"Good! Here's twenty dollars as a starter for your trouble."

The Irishman received the money with many thanks and decided marks of appreciation. Then he left, to bring his wife to the hotel.

He didn't know it, but Chick never lost sight of him from the time he left the hotel till he entered his rooms in the basement of the Kady, and from the time he and Bridget emerged therefrom till they got back to Nick's room at the hotel.

Bridget Donovan was a strongly-built woman, about thirty years old.

"Mrs. Donovan," said Nick, "I suppose your husband has told you who I am, and something about your tenant, Senor Silverman?"

"He have, sor, the saints defend us!"

"Now, we are going to arrest this fellow and send him to prison. But before we take him in, we must get some information, and you'll have to help us."

"Me help you, is it? Be hivvins, I wouldn't go into that man's prisince ag'in for the whole av Ireland. He may be a murderer for all I know."

"That's just what he is!"

"Look at that now! An' I've been goin' up there in his room all alone with him!"

"You are expected to take his supper to him this evening——"

"An' I'll not do it fur all the gold in New York!" she almost screamed, getting excited.

"You need not, but I'm going to send a woman to do it in your place, and he'll think it is you."

Nick went to the communicating door and called Ida out. Ida had heard all

which passed, and was prepared for what followed.

"Her take his supper up and him think it me?" exclaimed Bridget as she looked at Ida.

"Just wait till we get her fixed up for the job," smiled Nick. "Go into that room with this young lady, and do just what she tells you."

Bridget obeyed. Ten minutes later Ida and she appeared again. Ida was dressed in Bridget's clothes, and Bridget wore a suit of much better quality. But Nick got to work on Ida, and she assisted him materially. Occasionally Ida went into the private room alone. Every time she came out the clothes fitted better.

She seemed to be filling out or growing into them.

Finally she turned on Bridget and Pat, and struck an attitude. Both uttered cries of astonishment.

"Be the powers above, is it your ghost, Bridget?" said Donovan.

"Sure it's the divil's own doin' so it is. She could be ine twin sister, an' no wan would question it."

"Will she fool Senor Silverman, do you think?" asked Nick.

"Sure she'd fool me own mithher, if she kept her tongue shtill."

Nick winked at Ida, and the made-up Bridget said:

"Ah, thin, and it's hould me tongue, is it, I dunno? Sure me tongue's me own, an' I'll do wid it as I plase."

The voice was so like the real Bridget's that Donovan jumped out of his chair and exclaimed:

"It's the divil's own work, so it is!"

Nick's laugh quieted him.

"No, Donovan," said the detective. "It is just the power of imitation of a clever young woman. She'll go with you, and Mrs. Donovan will remain here till later on, some time this evening."

Mrs. Donovan was inclined to object at first, which caused Chick to laugh at Ida's

expense, but Nick succeeded in satisfying all concerned.

Therefore, when Senor Pedro Silverman, the pseudo artist, gave his orders that evening for supper, he did not suspect that it was not Bridget Donovan, the janitor's wife, who took it.

The order was for three. Half an hour later Ida, with the tray heaped with the smoking meal, knocked at Silverman's door, and it was opened in the usual way by Silverman himself. She entered. He turned the key, put up the chain in the door, and followed her through the private hall.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE ROUND-UP WAS MADE.

To any one not familiar with Nick Carter's ways it might have seemed strange that he took all this precaution, unnecessary, as it seems, in capturing his prisoners. He had them corralled in the fourth floor flat, and by guarding the fire-escape he could have broken in the door and arrested the inmates.

There were, of course, good reasons for the mode he had adopted to capture them.

One was because he wanted to accomplish his object with as little noise and notoriety as possible.

Another object was to get more information of the relationship of the conspirators to each other than he possessed.

Finally, he feared that two of the lot at least would commit suicide rather than be taken, if they found escape was cut off. Therefore, he must gain access to the flat by strategy—not by force.

He knew from what Bridget told him that no one ever got into the Silverman flat until the door was opened only a few inches and held there by a strong chain until Silverman had a chance to look out and see over the entire hall at that landing.

Ida was fully informed about the arrangement of the flat and her duties in detail, having got all her points pat from Bridget Donovan.

As soon as she entered, therefore, she knew exactly what to do, and where to go with the tray of food and dishes.

Instead of going with it to the dining-room in the rear, she carried it into the front room, and busied herself at once in clearing off a large center table, spreading her cloth thereon, and transferring the dishes from the tray.

She placed the supper on the table and had everything ready for Silverman and his two guests, when she seemingly by accident struck a glass of red wine with her arm, knocking it to the floor, and shattering the goblet into bits.

"Bad cess, it's awk'ard I am, though," she muttered, as she picked up the broken bits of glass. "I'll take this out, and be back in a minute wid a wet rag from the kitchen to wipe up the liquor from the carpet."

"Well, hurry up, confound you!" muttered Silverman, as Ida shuffled back to the kitchen in the rear. She was aware that Silverman never permitted the janitress to remain in the flat while he ate, but she had to return later and carry away the dishes.

Ida's object in getting an excuse to go to the kitchen was soon made clear. The moment she reached that part of the flat and saw she was not followed, she slid back the lock which held the window.

Then she threw her broken glass into the range with considerable noise, secured a cloth, held it under the hydrant, and hurried back to the parlor, where she wiped up the wine as well as she could.

"Leave the cloth till you return for the tray," snarled Silverman, as she started to take it back to the kitchen.

Then he showed her out into the hall, and locked the door after her.

Just as he turned the key the boy whom

Patsy had followed from the Marlboro appeared from a middle room, and said:

"Suppose we go back to the kitchen and make sure that the Irishwoman had no design in breaking the glass."

"Eh?" exclaimed the person known as Silverman. "Design? What design?"

"I don't know that she had any, but I wouldn't trust any one just now out of my sight. It'll do no harm to take a peep at the window which opens onto the fire-escape, anyhow."

"Maybe you're right," muttered Silverman. "We'll go and see."

So they walked back and inspected the window.

"You see your suspicions are unfounded," said Silverman, pointing to the window, which was locked.

"Well, it does no harm to be sure. We can now enjoy our meal all the better. I'll tell Philip supper is ready."

No sooner had both returned to the front of the flat than a man stepped out from a closet where he had evidently hastily hidden.

The man was the same who had been arrested in front of the Herald Building at noon that day.

It was Nick Carter, disguised as Casimer Kane.

"Lucky I took the precaution to lock the window temporarily. I imagined they might be cautious," he thought. "Now I'll leave the window open for Ida and Chick."

He unlocked the window again, and then stole noiselessly to the front part of the house. He knew exactly where he was going, having a clear knowledge of the flat and its arrangement from Bridget's description.

A minute later he was crouched behind a curtain which divided a middle bedroom from the parlor. It was in this room that Silverman's two guests were in retirement while Ida set the table. She had not seen either.

Silverman and his guests had just sat down to their supper.

Nick peered through the curtains, and readily recognized Philip Ferguson as one of the guests from the description he had of the young man from Luddington.

The detective had all along been convinced that Silverman was Loloa Zonetta in disguise, and that the boy was her precious daughter, Lucille.

He had quick proof that his conclusions were right.

Ferguson seemed to have no appetite. He was plainly frightened.

Silverman was saying, as Nick reached the curtain:

"This will be our last meal together for some weeks—perhaps for some months."

"Why, mother, what do you mean?" asked the pseudo boy.

"I've made up my mind to remain and find out what is the meaning of that man's masquerading as your father, Lucille, and, if possible, to discover where your father is—what has become of him.

"But the trail is getting too hot. That accursed Nick Carter will be down on us unless we skip. You and Philip must leave for Canada to-night. Once across the border, you can easily get to London, where I'll join you.

"You have the one hundred thousand dollars. That will keep us going till something else turns up."

"And Del Marvin!" exclaimed Lucille. "Look out for him, mother."

"Oh, he's harmless. Del Marvin has served our purpose, poor dupe. He imagined that you would marry him after you secured Brandt Luddington's money, and to that end he used his position to forge official records. We are done with Del Marvin."

"Perhaps I should have kept that promise, mother, had I not met Philip."

And she put her arms around the young man's neck.

It was clear to Nick's eyes that Philip

Ferguson was frightened almost out of his wits at the danger which hung over him, but he returned the caress of the beautiful adventuress.

"It would not be well for Del Marvin to know that Philip, after inducing him to commit a crime for the purpose of marrying you, came back with the proofs of that crime in his possession and married you himself. It is just as well that Philip and he should not meet."

She smiled at the couple across the table.

"We may all be happy yet," she said, "in spite of the partial failure of our plans. If I could only find your father alive and well——"

A startling interruption came to her words in the sudden appearance of Bridget, the janitress, who dashed through the curtains from the hall into their presence.

At her back was a man who fixed the frightened gaze of mother and daughter.

"Lord save us!" panted the false Bridget (it was Ida, of course); "he says he's just escaped, and is your husband, Senor Silverman, though how he kin be a husband to a man I dunno at all, at all."

"Woman, how did you get in, and who are you?" hissed the disguised Mrs. Zonetta, dividing her words between the two.

"Sure I kem in frim the foire-escape, and he kin spake for himself."

"I am Casimer Kane's ghost, I guess," said Nick. "At least, I look enough like him to have fooled Del Marvin, the clerk of the Marriage Registry at Buenos Ayres, and also your old tenant, Brandt Luddington. Therefore, I must be your husband's ghost, Mrs. Zonetta, for he's lying dead at Bellevue."

"You lie!"

"Do I? Well, you can see him if you'll go around to the hospital with the police."

"You—you—said—Brandt Luddington ——" gasped the disguised Lucille.

"Brandt Luddington can speak for himself," said Nick.

Then Chick and another man walked into the room. The other man was Brandt Luddington with his whiskers shaven off.

Lucille and her mother recognized him at once. So did the cousin, Philip Ferguson.

Lucille uttered a moan, and raised her hand toward her mouth.

Ida had moved unobserved to the back of Lucille's chair, and as Nick warned her by a sign, she, by a quick movement, pulled Lucille's chair backward, and the occupant was thrown violently to the floor.

Instantly Ida had her in her grasp. She had turned the tables on the woman who on the day before captured her with such violence.

The mother, quick as a flash, pulled a pistol, and aimed it at the struggling women on the floor. Nick did not know whether she intended to shoot Ida or kill her child, and then kill herself. But a shot from his pistol rang out, and her hand fell limply to her side, while the pistol in it dropped to the floor.

Mother and daughter were quickly secured. On the hand of each Nick found a ring containing, in a secret cell, enough poison to kill instantly.

A similar ring was found on Casimer Kane's hand at the hospital. Nick afterward saw its duplicate on Lucille's finger, and he suspected that each member of the family thus went prepared for sudden suicide when convinced that capture was inevitable.

It was the movement of the hand on which the ring was worn toward Lucille's mouth which caused Nick's timely sign of warning to Ida.

Ferguson was an easy captive. He was almost paralyzed with fright.

Mother and daughter agreed to plead

guilty to obtaining money under false pretences, and take ten years in the State's prison at Auburn rather than be sent back to Buenos Ayres and stand trial for attempted murder, for which, if convicted, they would, by the laws of that land, forfeit their lives. They are now serving their terms.

To save the disgrace to the family of the lawyer, Ferguson was permitted to go free, on promise that he would leave America and never return under penalty of arrest and prosecution for his participation in the plot to secure the Luddington fortune.

Brandt Luddington's one hundred thousand dollars were restored to him. Very little publicity was made of the affair, and few of the real facts in the case were published.

Del Marvin had been forced into a confession by Nick, at the Marlboro, before the descent on the Silverman flat. He was afterward glad to be permitted to return to Buenos Ayres without being tried for complicity in the plot against the Luddington's or to have his forgeries of official records exposed.

Ida took great satisfaction in getting even with Lucille, the "Swindler in Petticoats," and Nick Carter will tell you that he never had a prettier or more nervy prisoner in his life than the daughter of the notorious Casimer Kane.

THE END.

The next number will contain "Blackmailed for Thousands; or, The Facts in the Famous Ford Poisoning Case."

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- 214—Blackmailed for Thousands; or, The Facts in the Famous Ford Poisoning Case.
- 213—A Swindler in Petticoats; or, Nick Carter's Pretty Prisoner.
- 212—The Wizard of the Cue; or, Nick Carter and the Pool Room Case.
- 211—Run Down in Toronto; or, Nick Carter's Work for a Friend.
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TRUE detective stories are stranger than fiction. The Shield Weekly is a new series of detective stories, but it is "something different." Street & Smith's long experience in the publishing business has taught them that the average man and boy like nothing better than *good detective stories*. We have, in the past, published many of the old style, where the detective passes through a series of marvelous and hairbreadth escapes and finally secures his quarry. The Shield Weekly will, however, be *an absolutely new departure*. Each and every number of the weekly will contain a history of a complete and intricate crime, the solution of which is worked out by the skill and ability of the detectives. These are True stories, absolute chapters of experience taken from the note books of the greatest and most noted Chiefs of Police in the largest cities of America.

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The Shield Weekly
True Detective Stories
with Real Plots



It is issued every week on Wednesday. No. 1 appears Wednesday, December 5, 1900. It can be found on sale at all newsdealers. Try one. We know you will like it. **5 cts.** PER COPY

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